

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 00660 140836Z

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SUBJECT: CHASNALA MINE DISASTER - INDIAN PRESS REPORTS

REF: NEW DELHI 0381

1. FOR PAST SEVERAL DAYS (JANUARY 11 - 13) INDIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF THE CHASNALA MINE DISASTER HAS PAINTED A BLEAK PICTURE FOR A BREAKTHROUGH IN FINDING ANY TRAPPED MINERS ALIVE AS SEEPAGE FROM NEARBY DAMODAR RIVER AND ABANDONED MINES POSE DEWATERING PROBLEMS. ON BASIS OF A REVISED LIST OF TRAPPED MINERS, THE NUMBER NOW STANDS AT 375, THREE MORE THAN ORIGINAL ESTIMATES. HOWEVER, THERE CONTINUES TO BE SOME CONTROVERSY OVER THESE FIGURES AND WHETHER SOME OF THE MINERS WERE CONTRACT LABORERS OR SUBSTITUTES FOR WHOM NO ACCOUNTING WAS MADE. QUESTIONS OF NEGLIGENCE AT CHASNALA, ADEQUATE MINE SAFETY CHECKS, AND HIGHER COMPENSATION FOR THE FAMILIES OF THE TRAPPED MINERS WERE ALSO FULLY AIRED IN THE PRESS AND IN PARLIAMENT.

2. A STATESMAN ARTICLE SAYS, "HOPES FOR AN EARLY BREAKTHROUGH IN THE RESCUE OF THE 375 MINERS TRAPPED IN THE FLOODED COAL MINE HERE RECEDED TODAY (JANUARY 11), WITH THE AUTHORITIES FEARING HEAVY SEEPAGE FROM THE NEARBY DAMODAR RIVER AND ABANDONED MINES. FIVE OF THE INDIAN PUMPS INSTALLED HERE STOPPED WORKING TODAY

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 00660 140836Z

DUE TO WORKING DIFFICULTIES, REDUCING THE DISCHARGE FROM 12,000

GALLONS PER MINUTE TO 10,000 GALLONS PER MINUTE. WITH THIS SETBACK, ONLY 11 INDIAN AND 2 RUSSIAN PUMPS OUT OF 20, FOUR OF THEM RUSSIAN, WERE WORKING NOW. FIVE HIGH CAPACITY POLISH PUMPS WERE YET TO ARRIVE HERE."

3. THE HINDUSTANT TIMES QUOTES OFFICIAL SOURCES AS SAYING THAT A PRELIMINARY OFFICIAL INQUIRY TO DETERMINE THE NUMBER OF WORKERS INVOLVED REVEALED MANY BAFFLING FACTS AND MANY MISSING LINKS FOR WHICH NO SATISFACTORY EXPLANATIONS ARE AVAILABLE. AMONG THEM WAS THE NAME OF AN EMPLOYEE IN THE PIT HEAD REGISTER WHO HAD STOPPED WORKING LONG AGO AND THE ABSENCE OF TWO OTHERS WHO WERE ACTUALLY WORKING INSIDE THE MINE AT THE TIME OF THE DISASTER.

4. ACCORDING TO A REPORT APPEARING IN THE TIMES OF INDIA, "HOPE

FOR AN EARLY END OF THE 16 DAY OLD GRIM BATTLE FOR DEWATERING THE INUNDATED COLLIERY RECEDED TODAY WITH THE AUTHORITIES FEARING HEAVY SEEPAGES FROM THE NEARBY DAMODAR AND ABANDONED MINES." ALTHOUGH REPORT CLAIMS THAT 80 MILLION GALLONS HAD BEEN PUMPED OUT, THE FALL IN THE WATER LEVEL WAS ONLY 90 METERS IN THE 168 METER DEEP FIRST HORIZON, AND WAS NOT KEEPING PACE WITH THE INCREASED DRAINAGE.

5. THE PATRIOT SAYS, "THIRTEEN PUMPS, INCLUDING TWO SOVIET ONES, ARE WORKING ROUND THE CLOCK TO DRAIN OUT WATER FROM THE FLOODJACKETED CHASNALA MINE. " ACCORDING TO SEVERAL LABOR LEADERS, IF IT WERE NOT FOR HEAVY SEEPAGES, THE FIRST HORIZON WOULD BE CLEARED OF WATER IN THREE OR FOUR DAYS. BUT IN VIEW OF THESE HANDICAPS, THE ENTIRE OPERATION MIGHT TAKE 15 TO 20 DAYS MORE.

6. THE TIMES OF INDIA NOTES INNUMERABLE PROBLEMS IN DEWATERING THE MINE, WITH 24 MILLION GALLONS HAVING SEEPED INTO THE MINE CREATING FURTHER COMPLICATIONS. THE ARTICLE SAYS THERE IS NO PROBLEM IN PUMPING OUT WATER FROM THE TWO PITS-- THE PROBLEM IS IN THROWING OUT WATER FROM THE TWO INCLINES WHICH ARE NARROW IN STRUCTURE,

CHOKED AND NEED EXTENSIVE SUPPORT.

7. IN DISCUSSING THE CHASNALA MINE DISASTER IN THE LOK SABHA UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 00660 140836Z

(LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT), THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES, MR. YADAV, SAID, "THE WATER LEVEL IN THE MINE HAD GONE DOWN BY 97 FEET AND THE SEEPAGE OF ONE MILLION GALLONS PER DAY IN THE MINE WAS NORMAL AND DID NOT HAMPER RESCUE OPERATIONS. EIGHTY-SIX MILLION GALLONS OF WATER HAD BEEN REMOVED. THE DAMODAR RIVER WAS 2000 METERS FROM THE MINE AND THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF SEEPAGE FROM THE RIVER." HE NOTED THERE WERE SOME INTERRUPTIONS IN DEWATERING, BUT THAT THE INDIAN

AND SOVIET PUMPS WERE TRYING TO GET OVER THESE DIFFICULTIES. AS THE WATER LEVEL WAS GOING DOWN, PROBLEMS LIKE POLLUTION AROSE.

8. THE INDIAN EXPRESS REPORTS THE DAILY SEEPAGE IS 1.25 MILLION GALLONS. THIS PAPER SAYS, "SIXTY-SIX MINERS ARE TRAPPED IN THE FIRST HORIZON. THE REMAINING 306 MINERS ARE IN THE SECOND HORIZON 450 FEET FURTHER DOWN. THEIR FATE APPEARS SEALED BECAUSE DRAINING

OUT WATER BELOW THE FIRST HORIZON MIGHT BECOME PAINFULLY SLOW ON ACCOUNT OF THE SILT AND MUCK PRESENT AT THAT LEVEL."SAXBE

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